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Russia's problems are ours, too

There are tough times ahead for the Soviet Union, intelligence officials have told Congress. Witnesses including Adm. Stansfield Turner, 'director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told Congress' Joint Economic Committee that reduced economic growth potential and oil and energy problems lie in Moscow's future.

That ordinarily might be good news for countries that look on the Soviet Union as a challenge. In today's situation, one can't be too sure. Much of the postwar Soviet military buildup stemmed from a feeling of insecurity left by their narrow escape from defeat at the hands of Hitler.

Will that sense of insecurity be heightened as Kremlin leaders peer into the future and see the same portents that Adm. Turner sees?

The admiral doubts that Moscow will be able over the next 10 years to maintain its economic growth—as it has in the past—by increasing the "inputs of labor and capital to make up for the inefficiency" in the way these inputs are used.

He told Congress that up to 30 per cent of the Soviet gross national product goes into capital investment, that the growth rate of the GNP is declining, and that hard choices lie ahead. The labor force in the decade ahead will grow by less than one-half of 1 per cent a year. Oil production, which reached 10.4 million barrels a day in 1976, will peak in the early 1980s and then drop back and level off at 8 to 10 million barrels a day.

In a democratic country these pinching economic factors would normally lead to a reduction in the pace of the military buildup. But Adm. Turner does not believe that will happen in the Soviet Union. Apparently the Soviets are too insecure to give up that luxury unless and until they have no other choice.

That being the case, will those in the

Kremlin at some point conclude that time is no longer on their side, that some drastic action is needed to insure their future?

No one is saying, but the thought is disquieting. Is there a connection between their extraordinary nuclear and conventional military effort and their fear that something akin to economic decline lies ahead? Does this fear lie behind the Russians' present attempt to win control in the Horn of Africa, where they could monitor the shipment of oil from the Persian gulf to the West? As the energy crunch hits the Soviet Union, will it heighten the energy crisis that the West faces?

Who knows what the Russians think? Or will do? Defense Secretary Harold Brown may have given an inkling of what they might do when he warned that the Nazi blitzkrieg style of warfare has been incorporated into Soviet strategy in the Central European sector. If Moscow should feel that time is running out, would it not be logical to prepare for a quick war which would give it the assets, machinery, and technical know-how of Western Europe.

Its impending economic pinch would leave for the Soviet Union a smaller supply of currency to purchase those Western niceties. Would a blitzkrieg be a better solution?

What the Kremlin thinks about all this may be the Kremlin's secret; but the point to remember is that Moscow's future problem may become our future problem. And this in turn is why the Carter administration must be far more alert than it has been to the needs of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and to our national military preparedness. Neither of these things has begun to keep pace with the Russian effort, and the gap may soon be too great to overcome.